

A BRIEF HISTORY

Closeness to Nashville, frontage on the rivers, and the abundance of springs and rich soil made the Two Rivers property valuable from the time it was settled in the 1790s. The first house, built on the farm in 1802 by David Buchanan, still stands to the rear of the property.

William Harding purchased the 1802 house and farm in 1819. His brother, John, was the builder of Belle Meade Mansion in west Nashville. William Harding married Elizabeth Clopton in 1830; he died in 1832 shortly before their only child was born. William Elizabeth Harding, named in honor of her parents, would inherit the 1100-acre plantation upon her marriage to David H. McGavock in 1850.

The couple and their son, Frank, lived in the smaller house while they planned and built the mansion. It was erected in 1859. One can see the names "*David, Willie, and Frank*" stamped on the bricks of the back porch. The bricks, like the millwork, were crafted on the farm.

In the 1880s the estate was a thriving stock farm with horse breeding, cattle, and a dairy operation. One document states that there were fifteen tenant houses, thirteen stables and barns, and twenty-two other buildings. Many of these were destroyed by a tornado in 1933.

Frank McGavock took possession of the farm in the late 1890s. The financial Panic of 1893 had created a depression in Tennessee and the farm was near bankruptcy. His only son, Spence, leased out the farm in the early 1900s while he worked as a salesman.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Spence McGavock married Louise Bransford of Melrose in 1928. The couple remodeled the house, adding plumbing, electricity and a heating system. They lived at Two Rivers only a short time, though, returning to her family home after her father's death in 1933. Spence died in 1936. His widow remained at Melrose for the next eighteen years while caretakers continued the farming operation.

In 1954, Louise Bransford McGavock returned to the farm where she said she had always been happiest. She died in November, 1965. Her will named numerous family members, friends, and employees as beneficiaries. She also instructed that the remainder of her estate be sold to be used for the operation or expansion of the work of the Division of Hematology at Vanderbilt Hospital and Medical School. This fund, named The William S. Bransford Fund in honor of her father, is still providing assistance.

Two Rivers Mansion and its surrounding 460 acres of land were purchased by the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County in December 1966 from the estate of Mary Louise Bransford McGavock. A Federal *Open Space Land Grant* funded one-half of the \$924,066 purchase. The Metro Board of Education subsequently paid \$94,500 for the thirty acres where McGavock Comprehensive High School was built in 1970. Two Rivers High School (now Two Rivers Middle School) had been built in 1960 to the north of the Mansion on 26 acres sold to the city by Mrs. McGavock for \$57,780. Forty-five acres were designated as roadway for the construction of Two Rivers Parkway, a connector road from Briley Parkway to McGavock Pike. The remainder of the estate was developed as park property, including a golf course, ball diamonds, picnic areas, and

Middle Tennessee's first waterpark: *Wave Country*, which opened in the summer of 1980.

Luckily, the Metropolitan Government and the Board of Parks and Recreation did not share the opinion of the property appraiser who stated: *"The improvement is an old two-story brick house surrounded by service buildings. When the land is considered as to the best use, the improvements would have no value. The amount of land that would have to be reserved to make the present improvement blend with smaller houses would exceed any useful value."*

The appraiser had underestimated the vision of Metro Parks. The fourteen-acre tract set aside for the lawns surrounding the *"improvements"* lends a special air of grace and grandeur as one travels up the drive from McGavock Pike.

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Two Rivers Mansion, with its elaborate veranda, window facings, and trim, is a stately example of the Italianate style of architecture. The style is more ornate and richly Victorian than the earlier Greek and Roman Revival houses frequently found in the South. The room size and arrangement suggest that the house was designed for entertaining. The receiving parlors are located in the center of the house with entrances at both the front and rear doors. The family would receive guests in these rooms. The double parlors are located to the left of the house, and are separated by pocket doors. Today, the doors are permanently open. This 900 sq. foot room once served as the focal point for gatherings; today it can seat 85 guests for a wedding ceremony and up to 64 for a seated dinner. Two smaller

parlors are on the right side of the house: the front room served as a ladies parlor, the room between the two staircases served as a men's parlor. Past the rear staircase are the family dining room and the catering kitchen added during the 1970s. This new area was created from two rooms: the Butler's Pantry and a storage area for dishware and other items. The kitchen was located in the basement while the families lived at Two Rivers. During the renovations, restrooms were built in the kitchen area.

The rear staircase is wider because it was the main staircase used by the families. Originally the driveway circled the house. One can still see the outline of the first drive during dry, hot summer days when the grass loses its color. The family would exit their carriages or cars beside the back porch and enter through the door at the foot of the stairs. Bedrooms and a family sitting room were located on the second floor. *Servant calls* are located to the side of each fireplace on both floors. A bell rang in the basement when a knob was turned, and the arrow flipped to indicate where help was needed. Once used as living space for people working in the house, these rooms are today used for mechanical systems, custodial work space, and storage.